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United States General Accounting Office

Report to the Chairwoman, Subcommittee on Government Activities and Transportation, Committee on Government Operations, House of Representatives

COMPLETED

AVIATION SECURITY

FAA's Assessments of Foreign Airports

GAO

United States
General Accounting Office
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Resources, Community, and
Economic Development Division

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The Honorable Cardiss Collins
Chairwoman, Subcommittee on Government
Activities and Transportation
Committee on Government Operations
House of Representatives

Dear Madam Chairwoman:

In response to your request of October 15, 1987, we evaluated the methodology that the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) uses to assess security at foreign airports, especially those airports deemed to be at high risk of terrorist and other criminal activities. In addition, we obtained information on the Department of State's use of anti-terrorism assistance funds to enhance foreign airport security. It is important to understand that the scope of our work did not include evaluating the adequacy of security at these airports.

Terrorism is a worldwide problem and terrorist threats against civil aviation will likely continue. Following a series of international terrorist incidents in 1985, heightened public concern about the security of air travel prompted congressional hearings on FAA's civil aviation security program. In August 1985, the International Security and Development Cooperation Act of 1985 (P.L. 99-83) was enacted, which established requirements for FAA to assess security at foreign airports served by U.S. air carriers and from which foreign air carriers served the U.S. using, as a minimum, the security standards administered by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO).[1] The 1985 act also increased the scope of State's Anti-terrorism Assistance Program to enhance the U.S. government's efforts to fight international terrorism.

We have previously reported to you on the status of security at U.S. airports and FAA's efforts to enhance its domestic security programs. (See app. I for a listing of reports issued.) This report is in response to your concerns about international aviation security and is based on work conducted at FAA and Department of State headquarters and at five foreign airports deemed to be high-risk locations. For security reasons, we do not identify the airports. (See p. 8 for additional details on our scope and methodology.)

[1] ICAO is an international body representing 159 countries that establishes standards for international air navigation, including standards and recommended practices for aviation security.

Results in Brief

Through on-site interviews and observations, FAA inspectors determine security measures used at foreign airports. While FAA has made significant progress in implementing the requirements of the 1985 act, FAA inspectors did not test the operational effectiveness of security systems or observe and evaluate the security tests made by host country officials at foreign airports. FAA recognizes the importance of testing but believes it is inappropriate for FAA inspectors to make tests in foreign countries because of sovereignty concerns and possible danger to inspectors. Moreover, inspectors did not observe or analyze host country security tests because FAA believes doing so could adversely affect inspectors' rapport with foreign security officials. While we agree that security systems testing by FAA inspectors may not be appropriate, we believe FAA could enhance the overall security assessment process by requiring inspectors to make some analysis of host country test results.

Through fiscal year 1987, the Department of State's Anti-terrorism Assistance Program trained 3,000 people from 46 different countries. Of these, about 500 persons from 19 different countries attended courses designed to enhance aviation security. (The other 2,500 people attended anti-terrorism training not directly related to aviation security.) In addition, equipment costing about $2.8 million was provided to 18 countries, primarily to enhance aviation security. Although State's program is providing assistance to aviation security, we found that FAA did not formally inform State of training needs identified during foreign airport assessments that could potentially be met through State's Anti-terrorism Assistance Program. This information would aid State in ensuring that needed training is considered for funding.

FAA's Foreign Airport Assessment Program

Within the Department of Transportation, FAA's Office of Civil Aviation Security was delegated the responsibility for implementing the aviation security aspects of the 1985 act. These responsibilities include (1) assessing security measures at foreign airports, (2) consulting with the Secretary of State, and (3) reporting findings to the Secretary of Transportation when FAA develops information indicating that a foreign airport does not maintain or administer effective security measures. The 1985 act provides that the Secretary of Transportation must notify the foreign country when an airport does not maintain and administer effective security measures. These notifications are to include recommendations to remedy the security weaknesses. In addition, the American public must be advised if security measures are not brought up to standards within 90 days after the Secretary of Transportation notifies the

country of weaknesses. (See app. II for additional details on sanctions required by the 1985 act.)

FAA's Approach to Assessing Foreign Airport Security

Using two-person teams, FAA's foreign airport assessment methodology requires security inspectors to interview various foreign government, airport, and security officials; to observe various security measures, such as the operations of the passenger screening checkpoints and of vehicle gates to restricted airport areas; and if possible to tour the airport perimeter. The results are documented on a standard form that allows direct comparison of data obtained with ICAO standards and recommended practices. Inspectors attempt to validate interview data by corroborating responses of various airport, security, and air carrier officials at the host country airport. The program guidance used by FAA inspectors addresses each ICAO security standard as required by the 1985 act. Each of the assessment teams we observed used the program guidance material.

In addition, during each airport security assessment, FAA inspectors conduct security inspections of U.S. air carriers serving the airport and all foreign air carriers serving the United States from the airport. These inspections are made to ensure air carrier compliance with FAA-required security measures such as emergency plans, transportation of hazardous cargo, and procedures for matching passengers and their baggage before flight.

In 1987, FAA's foreign airport assessment guidance was revised following the Pan American incident in September 1986 and subsequent hearings held by your Subcommittee.[2] Before that incident, FAA inspectors generally made only short assessments of 1 to 2 days duration and did not document the basis for determining whether security practices met ICAO standards. Often only a "yes" or "no" was recorded on the assessment form to show whether an existing security practice was adequate. Now, one annual assessment is made at each airport and lasts 3 to 5 days, depending on airport size. Moreover, security measures are described in detail to record the inspector's basis for judging whether ICAO standards are being met. For high-risk airports, FAA makes additional visits primarily to assess U.S. air carrier compliance with special

[2]On September 6, 1986, a terrorist takeover of Pan American flight 73 in Karachi, Pakistan, resulted in the death of 19 passengers and injury to over 120 others. On September 18, 1986, the House Subcommittee on Government Activities and Transportation held hearings on this incident.

security measures required at these locations, such as redundant preboard passenger screening.

In early 1987, FAA began assigning foreign airports to individual inspectors for up to 4 years. The responsible inspector is a member of the 2-person assessment team. This approach has permitted the inspectors to establish better rapport and long-term working relations with foreign authorities and to provide continuity between assessments. Foreign officials with whom we talked during our visits were generally receptive to FAA's visits and appreciated the agency's assistance.

According to the ICAO Security Manual, testing is considered necessary to determine how well various airports' security measures work. While FAA determines what security measures are in place through interviews and observations, it does not test or validate the operational effectiveness of security measures at foreign airports. For example, FAA inspectors do not test to determine the effectiveness of the preboard passenger screening process to detect weapons or the effectiveness of procedures to prevent unauthorized entry into restricted airport areas. FAA's International Civil Aviation Security Program Manager said testing is the responsibility of foreign airport security authorities—not FAA inspectors. Although FAA inspectors determine whether tests of security systems are made, the Program Manager explained that FAA has not conducted its own tests because of sovereignty concerns (i.e., directing actions that are the authority of the host country) and the associated dangers to FAA inspectors that could occur because at some airports guards carry loaded weapons with orders to shoot intruders.

Moreover, we found that FAA inspectors do not observe or evaluate the results of security tests made by host country officials at foreign airports. The Program Manager said that FAA has not observed or evaluated security tests because such action could adversely affect FAA's rapport with foreign security officials. While we agree that security systems testing by FAA inspectors may not be appropriate, we believe that FAA inspectors, working with host country officials, should make some analysis of testing to enhance the overall security assessment process. This could include, where practicable, observing and evaluating host country tests of security systems to assess the operational effectiveness of various security measures. As needed, FAA could suggest enhancements to improve airport security.

FAA Assessments Report That Foreign Airports Are Meeting the Minimum Standards

FAA made about 600 assessments at 200 airports during 1986 and 1987 that concluded foreign airport security met the ICAO standards. However, on two occasions the assessments concluded that the standards were not met, and the Secretary of Transportation appropriately notified foreign officials. In one case the Secretary notified the American public that a foreign airport was unsafe after the country failed to correct security weaknesses within the required 90 days after notification. In the other instance, the country corrected noted security problems and public notice was not necessary. On both occasions, FAA identified the weaknesses, suggested enhancements, and coordinated with State's Anti-terrorism Assistance Program officials to aid in correcting deficiencies.

For the five airport assessments we observed, FAA advised each host country that the airport assessed met the ICAO standards. However, each report also noted areas of airport security that could be enhanced. For example, at two airports the FAA inspectors urged completion of planned perimeter fencing. ICAO standards do not require fencing to maintain effective control of the perimeter because the standard for perimeter security can be met with other procedures, such as guards, that were used at these two airports. However, because FAA believes that an entirely fenced perimeter enhances airport security, it recommended that the fencing be completed.

Because of the Subcommittee's concern with high-risk locations, we reviewed FAA's assessment records for the 54 highest threat foreign airports. In 1986 and 1987, FAA suggested 100 security enhancements at 33 of the 54 airports. According to the FAA Program Manager, many of these suggested enhancements were made. No enhancements were suggested for the 21 other airports. We also obtained opinions on FAA's foreign airport assessment program from international aviation organizations' security officials at ICAO, the International Air Transport Association, and the International Federation of Airline Pilots Association. These officials told us that, generally, while some countries may not like the U.S. government's policy of having FAA inspectors make security assessments, they believed that FAA's assessments have made a difference and have brought about a needed increase in security awareness.

State's Anti-terrorism Assistance Program

The Anti-terrorism Assistance Program was established as a training program designed to enhance the U.S. government's policy to combat aviation and other forms of international terrorism. The purposes of the

program are to (1) increase the security of Americans and U.S. interests abroad, (2) foster a cooperative relationship with like-minded governments, and (3) enhance the anti-terrorism skills of the civilian authorities of the participating countries, thus making it more difficult for terrorists to exist or conduct operations in these countries. The program, which includes various training courses such as crisis management and hostage negotiations as well as courses in airport security, also serves several other functions. First, as a policy tool, it provides a means for obtaining a political commitment from and establishing effective relationships with foreign governments. Second, it provides various anti-terrorism training courses and related equipment, such as airport police management and x-ray and metal detection equipment. Third, the program has become a focal point for coordinating terrorism-related assistance provided to foreign governments. The mechanism for this coordination is a working committee under the Inter-Departmental Group on Terrorism chaired by the Ambassador-at-Large for Counterterrorism. The group includes representatives from FAA and several other U.S agencies.

State has provided training courses to 3,000 participants from 46 different countries and expended about $25.6 million through fiscal year 1987. Among other things, the program has provided three different courses specifically designed to enhance aviation security to about 500 persons from 19 countries. In addition, of the total expended, about $2.8 million was spent for equipment provided to 18 countries primarily to enhance aviation security. (See app. III for a listing of countries receiving aviation security training and equipment from State.) We were informed, however, by the Program Director, Office of Counterterrorism, that about one-third of State's overall training program is for aviation security or could be related to it. The specific amount is difficult to determine because several courses benefit multiple aspects of security. For example, courses such as crisis management have applications other than just airport security.

While we found that State's program has provided aviation security training and equipment to foreign airports, we also noted that State did not receive feedback on training needs identified during FAA assessments. Basically, requests for training come from the foreign governments, through the American embassy, to State's training program. Each country's needs are reviewed annually to set priorities and approve funding. However, not all needs are considered by State because FAA

does not formally provide headquarters Anti-terrorism Assistance Program officials with specifics on training needs identified during security assessments.

For example, at one airport we visited, FAA inspectors noted that the chief of security lacked a security background and could benefit from some training in aviation security. FAA informally discussed this observation with U.S. embassy and host government officials who agreed it was a valid training requirement. However, it was not considered for funding because FAA did not formally convey the need to State's headquarters program officials. Both FAA and State program officials agreed that formal procedures are needed to inform State of training needs identified by FAA that could potentially be met by the Anti-terrorism Assistance Program.

Conclusions

Overall, FAA has made significant progress in carrying out the agency's mandate to assess foreign airport security as required by Public Law 99-83. Although GAO generally advocates testing and verification of security measures at domestic airports as a needed management tool to measure operational effectiveness, we found that FAA's foreign airport assessment process does not include such testing by FAA inspectors. We also found that FAA does not observe and evaluate security system tests conducted by host country officials. While security testing by FAA inspectors may not be appropriate because of sovereignty issues and potential dangers to inspectors, we believe that FAA inspectors, working with host country officials, should include some analysis of testing to enhance the overall security assessment process. This could include, where practicable, observing and evaluating tests of security systems to assess the operational effectiveness of various security measures. As needed, FAA could suggest ways to enhance airport security.

Finally, we believe that FAA should formally inform the Department of State of training needs identified during airport assessments that could potentially be met through State's Anti-terrorism Assistance Program. This information will aid State in ensuring that needed training is considered for funding.

Recommendations to the Secretary of Transportation

To strengthen the foreign airport assessment program, we recommend that the Secretary of Transportation direct the Administrator, FAA, to

- make some analysis of host country security systems testing as part of FAA's foreign airport security assessments. Where practicable, this could include observing and evaluating host country tests of security systems to assess the operational effectiveness of various security measures.
- develop procedures for informing the Department of State of training needs identified during foreign airport assessments that could be met through State's Anti-terrorism Assistance Program.

In addition to observing FAA assessments at five foreign airports, we interviewed Department of State embassy officials, airport managers, airport security officers, and U.S. and foreign air carrier officials. We reviewed the foreign airport assessment reports and air carrier station inspections and other documentation related to the assessments that FAA performed. Further, we met with the security officials of the International Civil Aviation Organization, International Air Transport Association, and the International Federation of Airline Pilots Associations.

At the headquarters level, we reviewed FAA's and State's files concerning the five foreign airport assessments we observed and other high-risk airports. We reviewed the policy, procedures, and records implementing P.L. 99-83; guidance to FAA inspectors; and the changes that FAA made to the assessment process after the September 1986 Pan Am attempted hijacking incident. We also interviewed FAA and Department of State officials, including FAA's Director of the Office of Civil Aviation Security and State's Director of the Office of Counterterrorism Programs.

We performed our work from January through July 1988 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

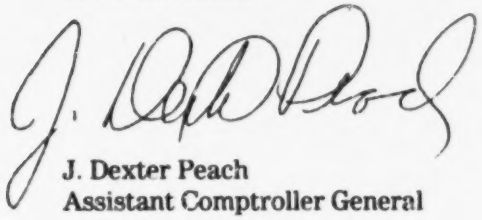
We discussed the contents of this report with responsible agency officials, and their comments have been incorporated where appropriate. However, as agreed with your office, we did not obtain official agency comments on a draft of this report.

As arranged with your office, unless you publicly announce its contents earlier, we plan no further distribution of this report until 15 days from the date of this letter. At that time, we will send copies to interested congressional committees; the Secretaries of State and Transportation; the Ambassador-at-Large for Counterterrorism; and the Administrator,

Federal Aviation Administration. We will also make copies available to others upon request.

This work was performed under the direction of Kenneth M. Mead, Associate Director. Other major contributors are listed in appendix IV.

Sincerely yours,



J. Dexter Peach
Assistant Comptroller General

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Abbreviations

FAA	Federal Aviation Administration
GAO	General Accounting Office
ICAO	International Civil Aviation Organization

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GAO's Reports on Aviation Security

Aviation Security: FAA Preboard Passenger Screening Test Results (GAO/RCED-87-125FS, Apr. 30, 1987).

Aviation Security: FAA Needs Preboard Passenger Screening Performance Standards (GAO/RCED-87-182, July 24, 1987).

Aviation Security: Improved Controls Needed to Prevent Unauthorized Access at Key Airports (GAO/RCED-88-86, Jan. 29, 1988).

Aviation Security: Corrective Actions Underway, But Better Inspection Guidance Still Needed (GAO/RCED-88-160, Aug. 23, 1988).

Sanctions Required by Title V, Public Law 99-83

If, as a result of an FAA assessment, the Secretary of Transportation determines that an airport does not maintain and administer effective security measures, the following actions are required by Title V, Public Law 99-83.

After advising the Secretary of State of the determination, the Secretary of Transportation must notify the appropriate foreign government authorities of the determination and recommend steps necessary to bring security measures up to the standards used in making the assessment.

If, 90 days after the notification to the foreign government, the Secretary of Transportation finds that the foreign government still has not brought security measures at the airport up to standards, the following actions will be taken:

1. The Secretary shall

a. publish the identity of such airport in the Federal Register,

b. require that the identity of such airport is posted and displayed in U.S. airports regularly served by scheduled air carriers, and

c. notify the news media of the identity of such airport.

2. Each U.S. and foreign air carrier providing service between the U.S. and such airport shall notify any passenger purchasing a ticket between the United States and such airport of the Secretary's finding.

3. The Secretary of Transportation, after consultation with appropriate foreign authorities and air carriers serving the airport and with the approval of the Secretary of State, may withhold, revoke, or impose conditions on the operating authority of U.S. or foreign airlines serving the airport.

4. The President may prohibit U.S. and foreign air carriers from providing service between the United States and any other foreign airport that

is served directly or indirectly by the foreign airport that lacks adequate security measures.[1]

[1]These sanctions will also apply in the following situation: if, immediately after the Secretary of Transportation's determination of the inadequacy of security measures at a foreign airport, the Secretary, in consultation with the Secretary of State, finds that a condition exists threatening the safety or security of passengers, aircraft, or crew traveling to and from such airport, the Secretary of State will issue a travel advisory pursuant to the International Security and Development Cooperation Act of 1985.

Aviation Security Training and/or Equipment Provided by State's Anti-terrorism Assistance Program Through Fiscal Year 1987

	Training courses			Equipment			
Country[a]	Basic aviation security	Advanced aviation security	Airport police management	Walk-through metal detectors	X-ray screening machines	Hand-held metal detectors	Portable radios
1		X					
2		X		X	X	X	
3		X	X	X	X	X	
4			X	X	X		
5		X		X	X		X
6	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
7	X	X	X	X		X	X
8		X					
9			X		X		
10		X		X			
11		X	X	X		X	
12			X		X		X
13				X	X	X	
14		X					
15				X	X		
16		X		X	X		
17		X	X	X	X	X	X
18				X	X	X	
19		X					
20				X	X		
21		X					
22		X	X	X	X	X	
23		X		X	X	X	

[a]Names of countries not included for security reasons.

Major Contributors to This Report

Resources, Community, and Economic Development Division, Washington, D.C.

Kenneth M. Mead, Associate Director, (202) 275-1000
Victor S. Rezendes, Associate Director
Thomas J. Barchi, Group Director
Robert W. Shideler, Project Manager
John M. Nicholson, Senior Evaluator